

promoting quality public transport.....

West Coast Main Line RUS
RUS Programme Manager
Network Rail
Kings Place
90 York Way
London N1 9AG

11th March 2011

Dear Sirs,

West Coast Main Line RUS

1. Introduction

1.1 TravelWatch NorthWest is an independent organisation representing all public transport users in NW England. We view the West Coast Main Line as the major arterial rail route from London to the West Midlands, the North West and Scotland.

1.2 We welcome the draft West Coast Main Line RUS. We agree with the need to invest to meet increases in passenger numbers. The needs of local connectivity and local services should also be heeded.

1.3 The consultation document shows large parts of the route under review to be operating at, or near, capacity now, with little room for major growth of services in the core areas.

1.4 This capacity constraint shows the urgent need for the upgrading of the small, slow trains currently being used on local services, which are only made up of two or three cars and have top speeds of 75mph or 90mph, severely reducing the paths available for high speed inter urban or long distance services. Paths for these essential services must be preserved.

1.5 We agree with the phrase on page 7, which states that it is firstly recommended that the longest train sets are deployed on the busiest services. This lessens the need to introduce extra services in the already busy network.

1.6 The whole strategy depends on the timely completion of other RUS commitments and other projects such as the Northern Hub. If HS2 does not proceed there will have to be consideration of future infrastructure changes to accommodate more capacity (e.g. double deck trains?)

1.7 We note that costs figures are presented in 2002 market prices. This seems somewhat out of date.

2. Gaps and Options in the North West Region

Gap OC4: On-train crowding on Sundays between Rugby and Crewe.

2.1 The main long distance high speed (LDHS) services now follow the core weekday service pattern on Sundays and the inter urban services should now follow this trend as Sunday becomes a major day for travel. These services should be hourly and not two hourly north of Rugby to provide connections to/from the Trent Valley from Crewe and the North West.

Gap OC5: On-train crowding between Birmingham, the North West and Scotland.

2.2 Class 390 Pendolinos should be used on these services to reduce the overcrowding and release the diesel class 221 Voyagers from running under the wires to strengthen other services and possibly be used on other non-electrified routes.

Gap/Option JT1: Faster Journey Times between London and Scotland.

2.3 We support the speeding up of services between London & Scotland by running fast through certain sections, but only if those towns disenfranchised by this permutation have replacement services that provide services to/from London at least as fast as today's services.

2.4 Service levels at Crewe – Carlisle intermediate stations should be a crucial consideration of the RUS but are not referred to in Regional Links. There are currently large gaps in connectivity between adjacent stations yet rail is the main form of public transport. There is a need to provide a clock-face hourly service for these stations as well as calling patterns to provide direct access from the North West to Stafford, Nuneaton (for Leicester), Rugby, Northampton, Milton Keynes and Watford Junction. Implementation of JT1.2 would require regular calls by enhanced Manchester/Liverpool & Birmingham – Scotland services (see below), as well as reasonable through London trains. The extra North West service should be used to help fulfil this.

2.5 Any speeding up of services should not affect established patterns of connections with local services at Preston, Lancaster and Oxenholme; loss of these could result in much longer journeys for some passengers, or a serious increase in rail-heading to West Coast stations at the expense of local operators.

2.6 The RUS does not mention through Blackpool – London services. This is an aspiration we have following electrification between Preston and Blackpool.

Option JT2.1: Improved journey times between London Euston and Manchester Piccadilly.

2.7 Manchester to London – plans to expand capacity to meet demand are welcome. However we have grave concerns at the negative effects that the introduction of a fourth service per hour between these points would have on local services to/from Manchester which have already been adversely affected by the introduction of the third service. Certainly the 11 car trains must be used on the three current trains provided per hour.

Option JT3.1: Divert the existing London Euston to Crewe inter-urban service to operate via the WCML between Stafford and Crewe.

2.8 The faster journey resulting from this diversion would be welcomed by passengers from Crewe, but there must be adequate provision for passengers currently using these services from the stations via Stoke-on-Trent, such as Alsager.

Option JT4.1: Reroute existing long distance high speed service between Birmingham and Manchester to operate via Crewe.

2.9 We agree with the desirability of faster services between Manchester and Birmingham. However, this option will have a severe negative impact on passengers from the Potteries, who use this to access both Manchester and the West Midlands.

Option JT4.2: Service alterations to the London Euston to Crewe inter-urban service and the Birmingham to Manchester inter-urban service to improve journey times and connectivity.

2.10 The extension of Manchester Piccadilly to Crewe or Stoke-on-Trent services will only lead to a reduction in reliability to these services, which are already disrupted by problems to the LDHS services on these lines. The extension of the Manchester Airport services to Stoke-on-Trent is dealt with under option RL3.1.

Option RL1.1: Irregular service from London to Crewe via the Trent Valley during the peak.

2.11 One option stated is to provide an extra service from London to Stafford during the peak. Why does this service need to terminate at Stafford instead of continuing through to Crewe via the WCML?

Option RL2.1: Divert one of the existing Birmingham, New Street to Liverpool Lime Street trains per hour to Preston.

2.12 This option would reduce the service between these two major cities by half and is not supported. The use of Pendolinos on the Birmingham to Scotland services (stated in gap OC5) would provide the necessary extra capacity on this route without the need for an extra train.

Option RL3.1: Extend the existing Derby to Crewe service to Manchester Airport.

2.13 This corridor would be better served by extending the current Northern service from Manchester Piccadilly to Crewe via Manchester Airport to Stoke-on-Trent. This would provide a higher speed service between Crewe and Wilmslow with the expected cascade of stock from Thameslink than would be provided by the diesel units used by East Midland Trains.

2.14 This would also provide the means of keeping two trains per hour between Crewe and Stoke-on-Trent if the London Euston service was diverted away from this line.

Option RL8.1: Additional services between Manchester Airport and Scotland; and Option RL8.2: Introduction of a new direct service between Liverpool and Scotland.

2.15 We welcome plans to improve links between Manchester and Scotland following electrification and a commitment to further consider through services between Liverpool and Scotland. These services can contribute to improved connectivity at intermediate between Preston and Carlisle.

2.16 There is a large suppressed demand for the reintroduction of a service from Liverpool to Glasgow and Edinburgh and this could easily be combined with an improved service from Manchester Airport, joining the two trains at Preston for the journey North. Whereas complete through trains are always preferable, it may even be possible to split the trains at Carstairs to provide hourly services between both destinations at each end of the journeys. This service was successfully provide many years ago without the ease of joining and splitting modern multiple units.

Option RL9: Poor frequency of services (when compared to other similar cities) between London and Liverpool.

2.17 The current hourly service between these two cities is insufficient for current needs and we feel that this requires upgrading to 2 per hour, preferably with attractive end to end journey times. Since Liverpool's Capital of Culture year in 2008, the city has grown both the business and tourist markets, not just within the United Kingdom, but internationally. This position requires a frequent and fast service between Liverpool and the capital, where most international visitors tend to be based.

Option RL11: Sub optimal connectivity at Carlisle between the West Coast Main Line, the Cumbrian Coast, Newcastle, Leeds and the Glasgow and South Western route to Dumfries, Kilmarnock and on to Glasgow.

2.18 This option appears to be of poor value because of the impact on freight services. However we feel the revision of freight and local, connecting services should be examined to try to improve the connectivity at this major interchange. This improved connectivity would increase the value of other service interventions.

3. Conclusions.

3.1 Many of the changes considered in the document are welcome, but should be considered alongside the impact on the increasingly important local networks throughout the region. These local services are not only important as commuter routes, but also provide connections into the long distance high speed and inter-urban services discussed here.

3.2 The satisfactory completion of other schemes is paramount in delivering the desired improvements to services.

3.3 Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours faithfully

JOHN MOORHOUSE
COMPANY SECRETARY